THE APPROPRIATE NAME IN PLAUTUS

BY

WILLIAM MILLARD SEAMAN

A.B., College of Wooster, 1930

A.M., University of Illinois, 1931

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
CLASSICS IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1939

URBANA, ILLINOIS
1941

THE APPROPRIATE NAME IN PLAUTUS

BY

WILLIAM MILLARD SEAMAN

A.B., College of Wooster, 1930

A.M., University of Illinois, 1931

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
CLASSICS IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1939

URBANA, ILLINOIS

1941

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/IA41549818_0303

THE APPROPRIATE NAME IN PLAUTUS

This study is a continuation of that conducted by J. C. Austin (*The Significant Name in Terence,* University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, vol. 7, no. 4 [1922]), and is intended to provide data for a comparison with the technique employed by Terence in selecting names. The present work covers six of the twenty-one plays of Plautus: *Amphitruo, Asinaria, Aulularia, Bacchides, Captivi,* and *Casina,* in which 90 names, or approximately one-third of the total, are treated. Presumably the results give a fair sample of the method by which Plautus, or the authors of his Greek originals, or both, chose their names, and their conception of the appropriateness of the same. In progress is the preparation of material on the names in the remaining plays, in order that the complete study may be published in the near future.

Since ancient scholars, notably Aristotle, Pliny the Younger, and Donatus, have asserted that there was a convention, observed by writers of comedy, of assigning to the *personae* in the plays names which were appropriate to their characters or roles, we are concerned here with examining the work of Plautus, in order to see how far he followed that custom. Austin's study very thoroughly covers the material relating to views held by ancient writers, as well as statements by modern scholars on the subject of the appropriate name.

Although some notice has been made in numerous scattered cases of the appropriateness of the more obvious examples in Plautus, no systematic investigation has as yet been undertaken to examine all the names, and to consider carefully in this connection the roles and characters of those who bear them. E. Koenig (*De nominibus propriis, quae sunt apud Plautum et Terentium,* Programm, Patschkau [1876]) and K. Schmidt (Die griechischen Personennamen bei Plautus, *Hermes,* 37 [1902], 173-211; 353-390; 608-626) contributed valuable material on the forms without paying much attention

to appropriateness. In using these two studies we have been able to supplement and to correct in a considerable number of cases. C. J. Mendelsohn, in his *Studies in the Word-play in Plautus* (University of Pennsylvania Series in Philology and Literature, 12, 2, Philadelphia [1907]) took note of the appropriateness of names in brief fashion, but dealt chiefly with puns and other word-plays.

Only those names have been examined upon which the playwright had some choice, that is, in the case of *personae* appearing on the stage, or those people mentioned by the actors as in some way connected with the action. Excluded are geographical terms, names of deities, of mythological and legendary figures, and of actual historical persons, for in these instances the names would usually have already some connotations apart from their use in the play, before the poet employed them.

The plays are taken up in alphabetical order, as they appear in the Oxford edition by W. M. Lindsay, from which all line-citations are made, except where otherwise stated. Within the separate plays the names are studied in alphabetical order, regardless of their importance or order of appearance in the action, or of the category to which they belong. The order of treatment, which is closely followed in each instance is: (1) the role; (2) the character; (3) the occurrence of the name in other literature and in inscriptions; (4) the etymology of the name; and (5) its appropriateness.

In some cases it is necessary to determine, as nearly as possible, the form of the name as Plautus probably wrote it, in order to decide the appropriateness with greater accuracy. In such problems we make use of paleographical information, the evidence of other literature, epigraphical records and other material that may cast some light on the question. Notice is taken likewise of composition, contamination, retractation, and the like, insofar as these seem to have a bearing on the name as Plautus used it. Wherever possible, we attempt to find an example of the name in inscriptions, in order to prove that its form, as we have it in our text, was taken from

everyday life, as well as to establish the validity of the spelling. Examples in other literature, although not so trustworthy as evidence, are also noted.

We distinguish several types of appropriateness of names. The first and most obvious is that of the literal etymology of the designation applied directly to the person. It may be suitable to him either as an individual, or as a type. An individual may bear a name which is in keeping with his peculiar role, or with his personal appearance, or with striking features of his character, as expressed by his actions, by his own words, or by description on the part of others. Or, again, his name may be appropriate to the occupation in which he is engaged, or to the social class of which he is a member. For example, cooks usually have names relating to the foods which a cook prepares, or to the utensils he handles. There are certain types of names which are descriptive of slaves in general, to *hetaerae*, to aged female servants, or to other classes. A name may be appropriate not because of its original meaning, but due to some association of ideas relating to it because a famous person once possessed it. The name may be significant only as a type borne by a freeborn citizen of the aristocratic and wealthy classes. We have notable examples, in addition, of names appropriate by *antiphrasis*, when they mean exactly the opposite of the actual character or behavior of their possessors; in such cases, considerable irony and humor are introduced by this contrast.

The following general results will indicate the method by which Plautus assigns the designations to his *personae:*

1. The great majority of the names are primarily descriptive of types, rather than of individuals, since they are appropriate to the occupation, or to the social class of the bearers, and do not distinguish them because of any specific behavior, appearance, or character. In only a few instances do they really serve to distinguish individuals. This is quite natural, because, for the most part, ancient comedy (as also most plastic and pictorial art of the time) was far more concerned with types than with minutely differentiated individual idiosyncracies.

2. Since the greater part of the names can be found in inscriptions, and in other types of literature, it is evident that they are taken from actual life and are not invented *ad hoc.* The fact that those found in inscriptions occur chiefly, and often solely, in Attica, indicates that the characters are Athenian, which is altogether proper, since the scene of the play is usually laid at Athens.

3. In those instances where the name is not found outside Plautus, and it is uncertain whether or not it comes from life, its similarity to known forms suggests that it may have existed before the poet made use of it, or, if it did not exist at all, that he invented it after the pattern of actual names.

4. When *personae* are merely mentioned, without being described in any way, their names are appropriate to their race, nationality, or social class. This is particularly true of people belonging to the servile classes, as also of *meretrices* and *lenae;* but even when Plautus is treating of free citizens, their names are those which members of such a class ordinarily bore.

5. In the few instances in which citizens of other communities outside Athens are mentioned, they seem to bear names native to those places.

6. Slaves usually have ethnic, or theophoric, or heroic names, as was customary in real life.

7. The study of names in Plautus sheds some light on social conditions during the period of the New Comedy in Athens, since they reveal the fact that the free citizens who are involved in the love adventures of the plays are, for the most part, members of aristocratic, wealthy families, people who are generally respected by others. The playwright frequently puts before his audience a contrast between the outwardly respectable position of these scions of aristocratic families with their fine-sounding names, and their actually immoral and scandalous behavior.

8. A number of preposterous names which Plautus clearly invents, much in the manner of Old Comedy, demonstrates his originality and his vivid awareness of the significance of all

names. Some are of Latin derivation; the rest are exaggerated caricatures of Greek names which were intended to amuse by their sound.

9. Plautus employs frequent word-plays, and both subtle and obvious applications of names, which also serve to indicate how constantly attentive he was to their significance and suggestiveness.

10. There are not many cases of appropriateness by *antiphrasis,* and only a few are exclusively of that character, since a direct application is usually found at the same time.

11. Plautus makes his names appropriate in all possible respects, the name for a single person not infrequently displaying several different applications.

It is evident, therefore, that Plautus carefully observes the convention, which, as ancient scholars have assured us, was regularly followed in comedy, of assigning only names that are appropriate to the *personae.*

VITA

William Millard Seaman was born on December 26, 1907 in Wheeling, W. Va., where he attended the public schools and was graduated from Wheeling High School in June, 1926. Entering the College of Wooster in September of that year, he did major work in Latin and Greek and in June, 1930 received the degree of Bachelor of Arts *cum laude,* with highest honors in Latin for an independent study of Plautus. While in course, he was elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa. He held a graduate scholarship at the University of Illinois the following year, receiving the degree of Master of Arts in Classics in June, 1931. From 1931 to 1935 he was instructor of Latin and German at Knoxville College. Returning to the University of Illinois, he continued his studies during the academic year 1935-36 and the summer of 1936. He was then appointed instructor in Classical Languages and Literature at Alma College. After spending the summers of 1937 and 1938 at the University of Illinois, he completed the work there for the doctorate degree while on leave of absence from September, 1938 until January, 1939. At Alma College he at present has the rank of professor. In his graduate work he studied under Professors W. A. Oldfather, H. V. Canter, B. E. Perry, and J. W. Swain. He is a member of the honorary classics fraternity, Eta Sigma Phi, the American Philological Association, the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, the American Association of University Professors, and the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters.